

Pressing Past Guilt and Shame

How do you feel about yourself? Are you peaceful and free to enjoy your everyday life? Or do you feel guilty about something in the past that you can't change?

I used to live with a constant feeling of guilt and shame because of the sexual abuse I experienced in my childhood, and I grew up feeling like something was wrong with me. I often thought, There has to be something wrong with me for my father to want to do that to me.

The shame of being sexually abused was devastating, and it became toxic in my heart and mind. I wasn't just ashamed of what had been done to me or what I'd done—I became ashamed of myself. And that poisoned everything else in my life. It took me a long time to realize that most of the problems I had—the personality issues and unhealthy relationships—stemmed from the fact that I didn't like myself. God wanted me to love myself—not in a selfish, self-centered way, but in a balanced, healthy way based on His love for me. Because the truth is, you can't give away what you don't have. And if you don't receive God's love for you and the mercy He freely offers, then you won't be able to love yourself or anyone else.

I remember being in church, hearing messages about loving people the way Jesus loves us, and I wanted so badly to be a loving and kind person. I tried and tried to be different, but if you don't have God's love and mercy in your heart, no amount of trying will make a bit of difference. In fact, it will just frustrate you because the more you try, the more you will end up making mistakes and feeling guilty about it.

Romans 8:1 (AMP) says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation [no guilty verdict, no punishment] for those who are in Christ Jesus [who believe in Him as personal Lord and Savior]." But until we get a revelation of this truth and see ourselves as

forgiven and free from sin because of what Jesus has done, we will continue to believe we are guilty and that we have to do something to earn God's love and forgiveness. And there's nothing we can do—no amount of trying in our own effort or strength—to earn or deserve His love.

That's why it's so critical for us to understand that Jesus died for us so we can have a relationship with God, not a religion. When God showed me that I couldn't love anyone else because I didn't love myself, it didn't seem right or feel right to love myself. Religion had taught me that it was good for me to feel bad about myself and to beat up on myself when I made mistakes.

It felt "right" to make confessions like, "I'm just a poor, miserable sinner" rather than believe the truth of God's Word about who I am in Christ. But as I got serious about my relationship with Him and began studying the Bible, I realized that who I am "in Christ"—my identity as a born-again believer in Him—is amazing!

Here are just a few truths that have radically changed my life:

I am a new creation—the old has gone, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17)!

I am the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

I am chosen by God, forgiven and made right with Him through Christ (Rom. 8:33).

I have a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col. 3:12).

When you know who you are in Christ, you realize that while you still make mistakes sometimes, you are not just a poor, miserable sinner. When you put your faith in what Jesus has done for you, His Spirit comes to live in your spirit, and the

nature of God dwells in you. This doesn't entitle us to be proud, arrogant people who think we're better than others. There's a big difference between who you are in Christ and who you are in and of yourself. It does mean that when we sin, we can repent with genuine sincerity, turn away from sinful behavior and attitudes, trust that God loves us and forgives us, and move on.

We don't have to stay stuck in the shame and guilt of our past, whether it's because of something we've done or what someone else has done to us. We can be free—in Christ—to shake off guilt and condemnation and grow little by little, one day at a time, into the people God has created us to be!

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